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Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms - FarmSupported Communities

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Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms - FarmSupported Communities

Abstract

Book review of *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited* by Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden

Reviews

"Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms--Farm Supported Communities"

**Trauger Groh and Steven McFadden,
1998. Biodynamic Farming and Gardening
Association, Inc., Kimberton, PA.
ISBN 0-938250-13-2. 296 pp.**

Groh and McFadden's book, *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited: Community Supported Farms --Farm Supported Communities* is a sequel to their 1990 book, *Farms of Tomorrow: Community Supported Farms--Farm Supported Communities*. As the titles suggest, both books deal with the relationships between farms and communities -- how they are today and how they might be in the future. The authors argue that one emerging way of bringing together producers and consumers of food provides a model for creating farms and communities that are mutually self supporting. This new paradigm is known as community supported agriculture, or CSAs. Cooperative Extension Service has begun to play a role in facilitating the development of CSAs in several states, and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service is now training its personnel to better understand how CSAs work and their potential for farmers. CSAs are often a good alternative for small farmers and Extension educators who work with small farmers should educate themselves about CSAs and how to help them develop.

A CSA is a community-based food system in which local consumers directly support one or more farmers, who in turn try to produce the quantity and quality of food that their consumer supporters want and need. In their simplest form, a group of consumers may be involved in the life of the farm itself to a limited degree. They will simply support the farmer financially. Unlike traditional consumer-producer relationships, however, in a CSA the consumer makes a predetermined financial contribution to the farm in advance of actual food production, often in a lump sum. Hence the consumer is

supporting a farm and farmer, not "buying" food. In many CSAs the consumers are also actively involved in other aspects of the life of the farm, by contributing labor, helping organize food distribution, or putting out a newsletter to bring the members of the community together, for example.

In their original book, the authors examined how farms and communities should be structured to be mutually self supporting. They revisit these issues in the new volume in six essays contributed by Trauger Groh. These opening chapters to the book provide a philosophical discussion of the nature of farms and communities and the role of farms in the life of communities. Groh takes a strongly philosophical approach in which he discusses not only environmental and economic issues, but also social and spiritual issues. The authors are proponents of organic food production, and specifically of one approach to organic production, biodynamic farming. While many will disagree with Groh's concepts, and disagree with the specific farming practices described in his "Ten Steps Toward the Farms of Tomorrow," the introduction to the book provides some interesting critiques of industrial agriculture and of the organization of food production and consumption in our society.

The second part of the book includes four essays that focus more clearly on community-supported agriculture--what it is, how it works, and what people who participate in CSAs think about them. The first chapter, "The Context of Community Farms: Industrial Culture and Agriculture," is a critique of the industrial model of food production. Certainly some would disagree with Steven McFadden's analysis of modern food production. However, this part of the book includes some excellent reading for anyone interested in CSAs. As a CSA member myself, I have heard virtually every concern described in the chapter "Belonging to a Community Farm: Families, Food, Farms, Festival," discussed by our CSA members. This is good reading for anyone thinking about starting or becoming involved in a CSA.

In their 1990 book, Groh and McFadden included case studies of several community farms. They revisit many of these farms in *Farms of Tomorrow Revisited*. Some of the original case studies could not be revisited because they no longer exist, and the authors have added some new examples. Again, this is excellent reading for anyone interested in the

CSA movement or in innovative approaches to community support for farming in general. The case studies are interesting, the analyses useful. They provide good "lessons learned" that can be applied not only to developing CSAs, but to many approaches to bringing the producing and consuming communities together.

The final section of the book, the Appendices, is full of good, practical advice. It includes, for example, suggestions for getting a CSA started, sample budgets, and sample prospectuses. It also provides a good list of resources for people who are interesting in developing community-based farms, whether they are CSAs or other approaches.

Groh and McFadden's book is a good resource for individuals and groups who want to become involved in community-supported agriculture. The particular philosophical stance and approach to agricultural production espoused by the authors should not be a roadblock to taking advantage of this excellent resource for people who disagree with Groh and McFadden. Practical advice, case studies, and lessons learned are the core of the book. For those who have little or no previous experience with community-based agriculture, this book brings together information and resources in one place. Even for those who think that community-based agriculture is either unimportant or unrealistic, Groh and McFadden's book is worth reading. *Farms of Tomorrow* will, at the least, stimulate thought. With luck, it will produce action.

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